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MEETING - PROGRESSIVE GARDEN CLUB

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

A radio discussion by members of the Progressive Garden Club, W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, presiding, delivered through WRC and 42 other radio stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company, Tuesday, September 29, 1931.

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ANNOUNCER:

Well folks, the Progressive Garden Club is holding its meeting today. Several of the members are already on hand, and I think they are cracking a few nuts while they are waiting for the others to arrive. Just a second and we will join them. - - - - -

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BETTY BROWN:

Here Daddy, crack this one for me will you please? Its old shell is so hard I can't even break it.

FARMER BROWN:

All right, let me see what I can do with it. --- That sure is a hard one. Why don't you try some of these thin shelled hickory nuts, they're better anyway?

AUNT POLLY:

Well, I never could crack hickory nuts that way. I would be sure to mash my fingers if I tried.

FARMER BROWN:

Well, I reckon it's all in knowing how. You see you must hold the nut very firmly between your thumb and finger and strike it squarely on the edge with the hammer. Don't hit it too hard at first, then increase the force of the blows gradually until the shell breaks. Now, watch me - - - - -

BETTY BROWN:

Daddy! You mashed your finger!

FARMER BROWN:

I didn't hurt it much, just bruised it a little. This old flatiron isn't the best thing to crack nuts on. Back at my old home, I used to have a heavy block of wood for cracking nuts on. It had been used so long that there were hollow places worn in the wood where thousands of nuts had been cracked.

(over)

MRS. BROWN:

Wonder what's keeping our Chairman! I've never known him to be late for a meeting before.

FARMER BROWN:

I'll just bet that old car of his broke down on the road somewhere and he had to be towed in.

AUNT POLLY:

Here he comes now, and there are a couple of men with him.

CHAIRMAN:

Hello everybody! sorry we kept you waiting. I want you to meet Mr. G. A. Reed, Nut Culturist of the Department of Agriculture.

FARMER BROWN:

Well, we are mighty glad to have you with us today, Mr. Reed.

CHAIRMAN:

And I also want you to meet my good friend, Mr. G. H. Collingwood, of the American Forestry Association.

FARMER BROWN:

Glad to have you with us too, Mr. Collingwood. While we were waiting, we've been cracking a few nuts.

CHAIRMAN:

The reason we were late to the meeting, we drove out to Ed Perkins' place to see some black walnut trees that Mr. Perkins planted about twenty-three years ago. The trees have a fine crop of nuts on them, and we were so interested that we almost forgot about this meeting.

BETTY BROWN:

Did you bring us any walnuts?

CHAIRMAN:

Yes, we brought along some of the walnuts because our subject for discussion today is "Nuts for Home Use," and we want to talk about the kinds of nuts for home use, and the best methods of gathering and storing them.

MRS. BROWN:

That's a good idea for so many people let nuts go to waste on their places, besides they don't know how to take care of the nuts after they gather them.

CHAIRMAN:

I wonder if Mr. Reed will not tell us what kinds of nuts are most important for home use in the different parts of the country east of the Rocky Mountains, and how to gather and store them.

MR. REED:

Well folks, I brought along several different kinds of nuts to show you. I will spread them out here on the table so that you can see them. You are all familiar with pecans which are grown extensively all over the South. Here are some wild pecans, and here we have some of the larger and improved varieties. Pecans are grown mainly in the cotton-producing States.

FARMER BROWN:

Yes, down in my old home in Tennessee, we used to gather the wild pecans, but we did have several trees of the cultivated varieties. Many a morning I've gotten up before daylight and gone down in the bottoms along the river where there were a number of native wild pecan trees, and picked up the pecans that fell during the night. Later on we built a wire fence around the trees so the hogs could not get the nuts.

MR. REED:

How did you cure and store the pecans, Mr. Brown?

FARMER BROWN:

Oh! We just spread them out on the floor of a loft over the kitchen and then kept the windows open most of the time so that they would get plenty of air. Later, when the nuts were thoroughly dry, we sacked them in rather loose bags and hung them to the rafters of this same loft over the kitchen.

MR. REED:

Now folks, here is the "Shagbark" hickory nut, the thin-shelled one that grows all over the North Central and Northeastern States wherever the soils are rich, moist, and well-drained. We find it as far north as lower New England, and south to northern Georgia. Then here is the "Shellbark" hickory nut; it is considerably larger and has a harder shell than the "Shagbark," and is found only in the North Central States.

CHAIRMAN:

The "Shagbark" hickory is my favorite nut. I suppose that is because when I was a boy we had a big grove of those tall trees with their loose bark near the school that I attended. Along in the fall after the first hard frosts we boys used to go nutting with grain bags slung over our shoulders and sometimes we would gather a half-bushel or more of those fine, thin-shelled nuts in the morning before the school-bell rang.

BETTY BROWN:

I'll bet you sometimes played hooky from school to gather hickory nuts? Honest now?

CHAIRMAN:

No, I don't think I ever played hooky to gather hickory nuts because when we went after "Shagbarks" we had to start very early so as to be first on the ground. By school time we had usually gathered all the nuts we could carry home after school. Go ahead, Mr. Reed.

(over)

MR. REED:

The black walnut is one of our most important native nuts. It is found throughout the greater portion of the Eastern States. The timber of the black walnut, as everyone knows, is also quite important. Both the black walnut and the hickories are being used for roadside planting, and for shade trees around the home. To some extent, grafted black walnut trees are being planted in orchards. In good soils these trees make fine growth, and soon come into bearing. Later, they become valuable for timber.

AUNT POLLY:

We had plenty of black walnuts out in Iowa, but I always did dislike to hull them.

MR. REED:

Black walnuts should be gathered just as soon as they are mature, in fact, it is well not to wait until they fall, but shake them from the trees so that the job of gathering can all be done at one time. The hulls should be removed immediately and the nuts washed and dried.

MRS. BROWN:

What is the best method of removing the hulls from black walnuts, Mr. Reed?

MR. REED:

One common method is to pound the hulls from the walnuts with light wooden mallets, or between two stones. Another is to tread on each walnut with the ball of the shoe, giving a sort of twisting motion to the foot. Still another is to spread the walnuts on bare ground and run over them several times with an automobile. I think the best way to hull walnuts on the farm is to run them through a corn sheller. There are certain kinds of machines which remove the hulls and clean the nuts much more satisfactory but they are quite expensive.

BETTY BROWN:

But, how do you handle the walnuts without staining your fingers?

MR. REED:

It's almost impossible Betty. When you have only a few walnuts to hull you can put on a pair of heavy gloves, but the stain soon comes through. If the walnuts are hulled as soon as they come from the tree they will be found almost white, in fact, if you place them in a tub of water as soon as they are hulled and scrub them with a stiff broom or wire brush, the nuts will remain nice and clean and free from stain. The stain comes from the green juice of the hulls. After washing the nuts, they should be dried in the shade on wire or slat-bottomed trays, but where they will get plenty of ventilation. Walnuts that are not hulled until after the hulls turn black aren't so apt to stain your fingers, but the nuts themselves become dark when you delay hulling.

CHAIRMAN;

Butternuts were fairly plentiful in eastern Ohio where I spent my boyhood days. What is the natural range of the butternut, Mr. Reed?

MR. REED:

About the same as the black walnut, only it extends a little farther north and not so far south. Butternuts should be gathered and handled the same as black walnuts, but they are more difficult to hull, especially if the hulls get a little dry.

CHAIRMAN:

We used to gather the wild hazelnuts and dry them on the roof of the smokehouse, then hull them. The cultivated filberts are very superior to our native hazelnuts.

MR. REED:

Yes, European filberts are very fine, and they can be grown in many sections of this country. They do especially well in parts of New York, Pennsylvania, and several other States.

FARMER BROWN:

How about chestnuts? Are the trees all being killed by the chestnut blight?

MR. REED:

No, we still have a good many native chestnuts in parts of the East where the work of blight has not been complete. The chestnut is one of our finest nuts, and we are now obtaining varieties that we expect will be resistant to blight.

CHAIRMAN:

Have any of you tried opening a green chestnut bur?

ALL:

I have! I have! and got the spines in my fingers too.

CHAIRMAN:

That is what you got for not waiting for Jack Frost to open the burs for you.

MRS. BROWN:

I would like to ask Mr. Reed what he considers the best method of storing nuts of various kinds for home use.

MR. REED:

Well, Mrs. Brown, as soon as the nuts have been cleaned and properly dried, they should be placed in rather loose-woven bags, and hung up in a dry, well ventilated place where the rats can not get to them. Under no circumstances, should the nuts be stored in tight barrels, boxes or cans that will exclude the air. Nuts should not be stored in a basement, or in underground cellars, unless such places are well ventilated.

FARMER BROWN:

What is being done to encourage the culture of our native nuts?

(over)

MR. REED:

The whole North has been surveyed to locate the individual trees of black walnuts, butternuts, hickories, native hazelnuts, and chestnuts producing the best nuts. This work is still going on and all farmers knowing of nut trees of any kind which produce especially fine nuts are urged to write the Department of Agriculture at Washington, D. C. A very interesting work along a somewhat different line is being conducted by my friend Collingwood here in cooperation with the Boy Scouts of America.

CHAIRMAN:

Mr. Collingwood, would you mind telling us about this work?

MR. COLLINGWOOD:

Certainly, I shall be glad to. Each year, for several years past, Mr. Reed has invited a small group of Boy Scouts on a trip to Mt. Vernon, the estate of George Washington, where they gathered the nuts from those historic walnut trees. These were turned over to Scout headquarters, and shipped to Boy Scouts in all parts of America.

CHAIRMAN:

Who paid for this?

MR. COLLINGWOOD:

You have put your finger on the real problem. At first, Mr. Reed paid the bills as part of his "good turn," but the demand grew until the work and the expense became burdensome, so it was suggested that the American Forestry Association might be willing to raise funds with which to gather and distribute nuts from historical grounds. With the help of the Walnut Manufacturers Association, the American Forestry Association secured from public spirited citizens enough money to finance the work for five years. You see it all grew out of the public interest in the walnuts at Mt. Vernon where George Washington made his home.

BETTY BROWN:

Have the Boy Scouts really planted many trees?

MR. COLLINGWOOD:

Our records show that the Scouts have helped plant fully ten thousand nut trees from historical places. These trees are growing in nearly every State, and descendants from the walnut trees at Mt. Vernon have been planted with special ceremonies on the grounds of the United States Capitol in Washington, and on the grounds of many of the State Capitols. During the spring of 1932, there will be many other historical plantings.

MRS. BROWN:

Could we arrange to plant some of these walnuts on the grounds of our court house and our school?

MR. COLLINGWOOD:

Yes indeed! You can get some of the nuts from one of the historical places like Mt. Vernon or Monticello, or by having your local Scout leader write to the National Nut Tree Planting Project at the American Forestry Association Building in Washington, you can get a small tree for planting on public grounds and nuts for home plantings.

AUNT POLLY:

What will be the character of the nuts produced by these trees, Mr. Collingwood?

MR. COLLINGWOOD:

That is a point that Mr. Reed and I have often discussed. You see the only sure method of getting good nut production is to graft or bud from trees of known performance. These nuts and seedlings from historical grounds may be as good or possibly better than the parent trees, but they do have a real sentimental and historical value.

MRS. BROWN:

Are you sure that you will have enough nuts from historical grounds?

MR. COLLINGWOOD:

We are depending upon the Boy Scouts and other public spirited citizens. The scouts are setting aside nutting days this fall and intend to ship the nuts that they gather from historic places directly to Mr. Reed's office in the Department of Agriculture. They will be hulled, sorted, and sent out to various parts of the country for planting. We hope to have at least two thousand bushels, and that means that everyone must be thinking about nuts for the National Nut Tree Planting Project. I feel sure that we will have enough to spare you a few for planting on your court house and school grounds, Mrs. Brown.

CHAIRMAN:

Our time is up, and in closing the meeting let us give Mr. Reed and Mr. Collingswood a rising vote of thanks. See you all again on the last Tuesday of October.

